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ABSTRACT

Oregon's new graduation requirements represent a bold effort to implement a mandated statewide competency-based program at the K-12 public school level. All the various ramifications of instituting a change of this magnitude cannot be predicted at this early date, but one major effect already evident is that local school districts have begun to conduct, perhaps for the first time in 40 years, a massive critical reassessment of all aspects of their educational programs. The motivating force in the reassessment process has been the need to determine procedures for transforming the theoretical constructs set forth in the graduation requirements into operational procedures for implementation in the local districts. The major purposes of this paper are to present background information about the new Oregon graduation requirements, to identify several major problems faced by Oregon school districts in operationalizing the new graduation requirements, and to describe the role of the consortium approach in providing technical assistance to local school districts. (Author)

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COPING WITH OREGON'S NEW COMPETENCY-BASED GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS - VIEW FROM A PRACTITIONER

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INTRODUCTION

Oregon's new graduation requirements represent a bold effort to implement a mandated state-wide competency-based program at the K-12 public school level. All of the various ramifications of instituting a change of this magnitude cannot at this early date be predicted, but one major effect already evident is that local school districts across the state have begun to conduct, perhaps for the first time in forty years, a massive critical reassessment of all aspects of their educational programs. The motivating force in the reassessment process has been the need to determine procedures for transforming the theoretical constructs set forth in State of Oregon graduation documents into operational procedures for implementation in their local districts.

The major purposes of this paper are to present information about the types of problems which districts have faced, and to describe the use of the consortium approach as a means of coping with the problems of operationalizing the new graduation requirements. Three basic sections are contained herein. The objective for each section is described as follows:

I. To present background information about the new Oregon graduation requirements.

II. To identify several major problems faced by Oregon school districts in operationalizing the new graduation requirements.

III. To describe the role of the consortium approach in providing technical assistance to local school districts.

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I. BACKGROUND

For the past ten years, citizens in Oregon have expressed dissatisfaction with the educational systems in practice. Major areas of concern have primarily focused on the discrepancies between the nature and content of existing school curricula and graduation requirements on the one hand, and on the other, the realities of contemporary life in which the graduating young adult must function.

In response to citizen concern, Oregon has for several years been in the process of reassessing the State graduation requirements. Consequently, the new requirements reflect a thrust toward a school curricula designed to provide students with competencies for coping in a modern complex society. In September 1972 the Oregon State Board of Education adopted the new high school graduation requirements and mandated that they take effect for students entering the ninth grade in 1974.

Analysis of the following chart reveals some major changes and modifications inherent in the new requirements. The old requirements were based upon two components: completion of credits and attendance for a specified number of years. The new requirements are based upon three components: credits, attendance, and development of specified competencies, with modifications in the areas of credit and attendance requirements. The major new component requires each student to demonstrate the competencies to function effectively on the job, as a citizen, as a learner, as a consumer, as an individual, and as a family member. Thus, students receiving a diploma in 1978 will have fulfilled the credit and attendance requirements and also will have demonstrated the competencies considered necessary as defined by the school district for modern-day survival in a complex society.

OREGON GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

OLD

CREDITS

Required Subjects

English/Language Arts	3
Social Studies	2
U.S. History	
Modern Problems	
Health and Physical Education	2
Science	1
Mathematics	1
Electives	10
Total	19

ATTENDANCE

Four Years Experience in School

NEW

CREDITS

Required Areas of Study

Communications	3
Social Science	1
Health Education	1
Physical Education	1
Laboratory Science	1
Mathematics	1
Personal Finance	1
Career Education	1
Citizenship Education	1
Electives	10
Total	21

ATTENDANCE

Early or Delayed Graduation -- Variety of Settings

COMPETENCIES

1. PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT
   - Read, Listen, Analyze, Speak, Write, Compute
   - Scientific/Technological/Process
   - Healthy Mind and Body
   - Life-long learner

2. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY
   - Citizen/Community, State, Nation
   - Citizen/Interaction with Environment
   - Citizen/Streets and Highways
   - Consumer/Goods and Services

3. CAREER DEVELOPMENT
   - Career/Habits
   - Career/Positive Attitudes
   - Career/Interpersonal Relationships
   - Career/Decisions
   - Competencies/Chosen Career Areas

II. MAJOR PROBLEMS FACED BY OREGON SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN OPERATIONALIZING THE NEW GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

Most school districts in Oregon reacted favorably to the new graduation requirements as mandated by the Oregon Board of Education in 1972. The new requirements had been several years in the developmental stages, and during the process of drafting the new requirements school districts had been involved in review meetings conducted throughout the state. Ample opportunity had been provided for input into the final product. However, as school districts prepared to meet the target date of implementing the new requirements with the freshman class of 1974, they gradually began to perceive the magnitude of the task and the amount of research and development work that had to be accomplished to operationalize the new requirements within a relatively short time frame. Following are ten of the major problems encountered by districts as they approached the task.

1. Lack of Resource Allocation

   School systems had not planned ahead in terms of budgeting resources for the curriculum development work required by the new graduation requirements. Furthermore, the Oregon Board of Education, when adopting the new requirements, had not allocated funds to assist school systems. Thus, the problem: A tremendous amount of curriculum development work to be accomplished with virtually no planned initial resource assistance.

2. Implementation of a New Component -- Competency-Based Program

   The new requirements placed the primary responsibility for implementation of the competency-based component on the local school districts. Yet virtually none of the local districts in Oregon had previously been involved in any type of competency-based program. In addition, no models were immediately available from districts across the nation because of the particular focus on competencies for functioning in a modern society

inherent in the Oregon approach. Hence, the problem: Implement a unique competency-based program without any initial guidelines for defining the nature and scope of the intended thrust of the new requirements.

3. Short Time Frame for Implementation

The graduation requirements were adopted in September of 1972, yet districts were required to file their plans of implementation by July of 1974. Furthermore, the state guidelines were not developed and made available until July of 1973. In essence, districts were faced with developing and implementing the major portions of the new requirements virtually within a 12-month period from July 1973 to July 1974. Thus, the problem: Develop a competency-based program and other aspects of the new graduation requirements within what amounted to about a one year span of time.

4. Involvement of Staff in District Plan Development

The competency-based component of the new requirements mandated that local districts must identify their own competencies and set of performance indicators. For this reason, it became clear that members of a district's staff must of necessity be involved in the determination of the district's set of competencies. Consider the problem: Achieve consensus of district personnel to agree on a single set of competencies and performance indicators which all students must demonstrate before graduation from high school.

5. Technical Development of Competency-Based Program

The new requirements identified three general competency areas (Personal Development, Social Responsibility and Career Development) but placed the responsibility for technical development of the district set of competencies

on the district staff. Immediately a number of questions arose, such as:

-What format should a program goal follow?

-What format should a competency statement follow?

-What format should a performance indicator follow?

-How many competencies should a district require?

-How many performance indicators should a district require?

Local districts were faced with a tremendous problem: Develop a competency-based program that would answer such basic questions as those stated above.

6. Determine the Relationship Between Credit and Competency-Based Components of New Requirements

The new requirements mandated both the credit and competency-based components for school graduation. However, they did not spell out the relationship that should exist between these two components. Many districts are still struggling with determining the relationship between credits and competencies. Thus, the problem: Determine the relationship between the two components and incorporate this into the district plan of implementation.

7. Develop Teaching Approaches For Survival Competencies

The notion of survival competencies constitutes a major aspect of the new graduation requirements. However, in terms of the conventional teaching approaches the concept of survival competencies was essentially unknown. To adequately implement this component required a major reassessment by staff as to the definition of survival. Consequently, the problem: Develop teaching approaches and materials that would successfully implement the notion of survival competencies within the course structure of the school's curriculum.

8. Develop Measurement Procedures for Competency Demonstration

The process of providing for competency demonstration and measurement of competencies constitutes an area of concern for local districts. In most cases, districts have delegated this responsibility to the individual teacher in the classroom. The assumption is that the teacher because of his/her role in the teaching process will be able to measure student demonstration of competencies. However, many teachers and administrators realized that this assumption may not be valid and that work needed to be accomplished to assist teachers in this function. In essence, the problem: Develop district procedures and training activities to assist teachers and/or others in the crucial role of competency demonstration evaluators.

9. Develop a Record Keeping System and Accompanying Management Procedures for Recording Competency Completion

The new requirements state that each district shall maintain a record of competency completion for each student. However, as districts identified their set of competency statements and performance indicators it became apparent that this record keeping function would be a difficult problem to solve. For instance, most districts identified approximately 100-200 competency statements. Thus, the individual student record keeping aspect of the new requirements posed this problem: Develop and maintain a district record keeping system which would provide immediate access to approximately 100-200 pieces of information plus other required data including grades, etc. for every student.

10. Develop a Public Information Program for Students, Staff and Patrons to Inform Them of the New Requirements

Because the requirements were state-wide and affected all students

graduating in 1978 and because of the sweeping changes incorporated in the requirements, it became clear that the public must be informed as districts determined their approach to implementing the requirements. Thus, the problem: Develop a plan to inform all segments of the community (parents, staff, students, patrons) about the district approach to the new requirements.

These ten problems that districts had to face before the new graduation requirements could be implemented at the district level posed a tremendous challenge. It should be emphasized that the above list is not complete nor have all districts developed management solutions to all the problems identified. The point to stress is that local school districts worked together with the State Department of Education to provide the necessary resources and the cooperative spirit to tackle the problems of implementing the new Oregon graduation requirements. Perhaps, one reason this occurred was because of a belief that the new requirements had potential for providing an improved education program for students and thus, the new program was worth the extra effort and resources needed to make the plan successful.

III. ROLE OF CONSORTIUM APPROACH IN PROVIDING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

As local districts began the task of implementing the new requirements, it became apparent to them that no single district could effectively produce the necessary developmental curriculum materials and management procedures. In addition, the State Department of Education likewise realized that the scope of the task was beyond the SDE's resources, both fiscal and staff. Thus, the notion of using a consortium approach for providing technical assistance to school districts evolved as one viable approach to the problem. The concept of consortiums is not

a new idea in terms of research and development projects. However, a unique feature of the Oregon approach was that school districts pooled their key staff members in a research and development effort to produce model materials for implementing the new requirements. Furthermore, the thrust of the consortiums was to develop model materials and management procedures aimed at application on the local district level as opposed to transporting in materials produced somewhere else in the nation. In other words, most of the model guidelines and management procedures currently in use were drafted by staff members of local districts in Oregon.

The State Department of Education played a key role in the formation of consortiums across the state. They served as a facilitator in terms of providing basic fiscal and staff resources to encourage the development of the consortium approach. And they promoted the interlinking of consortiums as a way to combine the total resources (fiscal and staff) available in the state. Several outcomes resulted from consortium efforts which were especially helpful to local school districts as they began to implement the new requirements. These outcomes may be described as follows: 1) development of a set of six booklets which provided model guidelines for districts to utilize as they drafted their own plan of implementation; 2) shared staff leadership between school districts, intermediate education districts (IED's) and SDE as the consortiums were involved in the process of drafting model materials and management procedures; 3) development of commitment by district, IED and SDE staff to the basic concepts of the new graduation requirements.

It may appear at this point that the consortiums were formed with complete harmony and singleness of purpose. In many respects this is true, but it is important to note that certain conditions existed in Oregon which may have made possible the formation and successful operation of the consortium approach. The following discussion describes two types of conditions: 1) those which promoted

the formation of consortiums; and 2) those which promoted the development of successful management procedures for the consortiums.

First, what conditions existed which encouraged the educational agencies in Oregon to cooperate together in several consortiums? Several seem pertinent:

. Mandated plan of new graduation requirements affected all school districts.

. Various education agencies had cooperated on past curriculum projects.

. New graduation requirements program posed a greater problem than any one district could solve.

. All students graduating in 1978 would earn the new state diploma; thus, each district had to be aware of implementation procedures in other districts.

. Neither district and/or state resources had been allocated for the development of individual district approaches to the new requirements.

. Time frame was short to develop district plans of implementation.

. Technical staff was limited in any one educational agency to develop materials and procedures for a competency-based program.

. District personnel lacked experience in being involved with competency-based education program.

. There were no model programs available for observation which utilized a competency-based education approach.

. Key personnel from a number of agencies were willing to work together to form consortiums.

Second, what conditions facilitated the development of successful consortium management procedures?

. Representatives from the affected educational agencies were involved as active members of the consortium.

. Personnel chosen or appointed to the consortium were adept as facilitators

in the organizational process of operating projects.

. Management of the consortium depended upon the consensus style of decision-making rather than on a voting style to arrive at final decisions.

. Resources for the operation of the consortium were derived from the participating agencies and the State Department of Education.

. Consortiums developed model materials to meet the needs of all districts rather than drafting products for any one individual district.

Consortiums have been an effective means for providing technical assistance for local school districts.

SUMMARY

At this point in time, it is too early to determine the successes and failures of Oregon districts in implementing all three components of the new graduation requirements -- credits, attendance, and competencies. It appears that the most difficult problems generated by the requirements are associated with the competency-based component.

One impact of the new requirements has been the critical reassessment by districts of their total educational program. This reassessment has been conducted on a massive scale in terms of time, resources and staff involvement and is probably the most comprehensive in scope that has occurred in Oregon during the last four decades. As a result, school districts have been forced into a position of reconsidering specific aspects of their total educational program. For instance, districts have had to struggle with certain basic questions such as:

. What are the goals for the school district?

. What is the curriculum content of specific required areas of study?

. What are the competencies that students need to function in a modern society?

. How do you determine the successful demonstration of these competencies by students?

. Are there ways to award credit for courses based upon competencies rather than required attendance in class?

. Are school personnel willing to accept the competency-based program concept?

. How will school patrons react to the notion of competency-based programs?

These represent only a few of the basic questions which have created concern for districts in Oregon. Perhaps, the most difficult question yet to be answered is: Will Oregon's competency-based program result in a significant increase in capability of students to cope in a modern society? These questions and others need to be studied on a continuing basis as the new requirements are tested in school districts. This provides a unique opportunity for educational researchers to study the impact of this type of educational reform upon students, district staff, citizens and local district programs. Oregon educators are hopeful that this bold attempt to implement a competency-based graduation plan will lead to educational programs which prepare boys and girls for the realities of contemporary life.